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Scholarly admiral to head CIA?

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Adm. Stansfield Turner, President Carter's leading candidate to head the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), represents a happy combination of top scholarship with military experience and achievement.

In scholarship, he was 25th in the class of 1946 at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis and then was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University (MA 1950). President Carter was 59th in the same class at the Naval Academy.

In military experience, he had sea command in Vietnam waters during the Vietnam war and then commanded a carrier task group in the Mediterranean during a tense period of the cold war in 1970 and 1971, when the Soviets were pushing their new sea power into that sea. From carrier command, he went to the Pentagon as director of the systems analysis division of the office of chief of naval operations. After that, he was president of the Naval War College, commander of the U.S. Second Fleet, and NATO commander, South.

Few officers in U.S. Naval history have advanced so rapidly. He went from ensign in 1946 to full admiral in 1975. He was the second post-World War II graduate from Annapolis to achieve the rank of full admiral — and hence the second full admiral to have had his entire military experience in the events which have happened since that war. He has matured in a Navy preoccupied with the new competition of the growing Soviet Navy.

Experience has produced in Admiral Turner a deep concern over the problem of keeping open the sea lanes to America's allies. In an article in the January issue of Foreign Affairs magazine, he says that "the fundamental role of our Navy has been sea control," and he notes that the new Soviet Navy "is primarily designed to deny that use to others." In his opinion, the battle for the sea lanes is the essence of the rival naval building programs of the two countries. He favors building new ships designed to assert American sea-control.

Admiral Turner is also concerned about the damage which intemperate remarks in Washington can have. In the article quoted above, he said: "A doomsday picture convincingly drawn for a congressional budgetary committee may negatively influence other nations' perceptions of our naval effectiveness. And a few extra ships in the budget or at sea may not be enough to overcome an inaccurate perception of weakness."

Stansfield Turner knew Jimmy Carter at the Naval Academy. Admiral Turner called on Mr. Carter in Atlanta, when the latter was governor of Georgia. He was invited by the governor to send him material in the latest developments in naval and other military affairs. They have been in communication ever since.

Admiral Turner is an innovator. On taking over the presidency of the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, he did away at once with much of the old pomp and circumstance, and initiated courses previously unknown to the curriculum there. Students were taken out of uniform, except for special military occasions. He made them study the history of warfare, beginning with the Peloponnesian War (between Athens and Sparta). He invited such unorthodox speakers as Vietnam war critic David Halberstam to give his students both sides of controversial issues.

The Monitor's Rome contributor, David Willey, reports that Admiral Turner left Rome on Feb. 2 on an hour's notice, headed for Washington. (He met with Mr. Carter on Feb. 3.) His press aide followed him on Feb. 6. Beginning Feb. 2, the FBI began the routine inquiry which is mandatory in the case of all high presidential appointments. FBI agents said they were under orders to complete the survey as quickly as possible.

Mr. Willey also says Admiral Turner is a nonsmoker and does not drink, but has been a regular party giver and goer. He likes floating new ideas and getting his colleagues to discuss them in the open. He is above all regarded as an optimist. In spite of the growing Soviet naval threat, he is persuaded that many commentators take an unduly gloomy view of the future of NATO in the Mediterranean.

The CIA has three admirals and one general on its list of former directors. Its first director was Rear Adm. Sidney Souers in 1946. Its second was Rear Adm. Roscoe Hillenkoetter from 1947 to 1950. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith and Vice-Adm. William Raborn Jr. were the other military directors.



Admiral Turner: on a CIA tack